

FR1ENDS of the CH1LDREN

Generational Change,
One Child at a Time

Boston

Let's fast forward into the future, June 10th 2016 - the date of my graduation, imagine me in the black cap and gown walking across the stage. Now let's backtrack to the present day. My name is Alonzo, aka Big Zo at Friends. Not only am I big in size, but also personality.

You will never know by looking at me now, but I was once a shy little kid with buck teeth and I had a head that was too big for my body. My story with Friends started at the John Marshall Elementary School in Dorchester. A group of us were told to go outside to the playground. That was when we were introduced to our Mentors. Being a part of this program meant that I would have a friend until high school. I thought that was the best thing ever. My first mentor was Mr. Anthony. He was the one who taught me how to act like a gentleman and how to respect ladies (a skill that is very helpful to me now that I am a teenager). He was the one to teach me about the ways of life, and I was happy.

Friends of the Children-Boston believes in our ability to be great – that's why they call us Achievers to show that they believe in us. During the 12 years I've been with the organization, I have seen mentors play different roles for us Achievers. On a typical day, you can see a mentor work with an achiever who is struggling with his math homework, while another mentor works to find critical resources for an Achiever and her family who had just been evicted from their home. The Mentors understand and support the Achievers in every aspect of their lives - home, school, community - you name it, they are there.. There is a saying at Friends that goes – “we are relentless so they can be resilient”. The mentors truly will go above and beyond to make sure the Achievers can succeed.

As for me, Friends of the Children-Boston gave me some of the happiest moments growing up. My first memorable moment with Friends was going apple picking. It was my first time visiting an apple orchard. I was surrounded by my friends, my mentor and my Family Friend, Rob and Carrie (Acknowledge Rob and Carrie). Our challenge was to see who could find the biggest apple, and even though my apples were not the biggest, the day meant a lot to me. Before that day, I hated apple, and I still do. But on that day, the apples I picked with my friends tasted superb!

I experienced many of “First”s with Friends - my first experience picking apples, my first time building a gingerbread house, and my first J O B because I was in need of MONEY and something to put down on my resume. And most recently my acceptance to a highly competitive summer internship with Grand Circle Travel. All of these firsts expand my world, and at times, it allowed me to take a much needed break from whatever was going on in my life.

You may ask, so what? These may seem like small things, but these first experiences opened more doors and led me to more new experiences. The apple picking trip led to my first time attempting to make an apple pie by myself. The first gingerbread house I built helped me realize

that I am very creative and led me to take photography classes at Lesley University. And Remember that first job Friends of the Children helped me get? It gave me enough experience to get a second job. And in a couple months following my graduation, I will be traveling to Africa with the Lewis Family Foundation Next Generation Leader Program. So all of these seemingly small things made my world bigger and gave me opportunities that I would not otherwise have. As I write this speech I think about college. Friends have given the opportunity to expand my connections and create a concrete foundation to get myself ready college. I don't know what the future holds for me and where i will be in 12 years. But I have many dreams. One of them is to open up a University focused on students who have been in foster care, and also for those who have been adopted. I call it Global University where everyone is welcomed from all around the world, there are majors for everyone and it will be affordable. And of course, for those of you who have met me, I haven't given up on the idea of opening up a restaurant yet! Until then, I'll take one step at a time towards my dreams to make it a reality.

Before I finish my speech, I'd like to take a moment to thank a few very special people who have made it possible for me to get to where I am today. Frank (find Frank and acknowledge him), my mentor, thank you for always making sure I never go hungry and staying on me to improve my grades. Rob and Carrie (find them and acknowledge them), my Family Friend, thank you for making me first CD - it was the first thing that someone has hand-made for me. Tony (find Tony and acknowledge him), dad, thank you for supporting my dreams, dealing with my tantrums over the last four years. And finally mi madre (find Louis and acknowledge her) for showing me the tough love that I needed to stand on my own two feet.

And for listening to my speech, I want to thank you guys for coming out today to support friends and help another youth gain a mentor. And before I can give my advice to my future achievers, I have decided to go to Pine Manor College this year. And to all my future achievers, do your homework to the best of your ability, try new things and spread your wings.

Thank You!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!